



SC Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission

Providing Opportunity. Promoting Choice.

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Katherine H. Harrison
Executive Director

MINUTES

South Carolina Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission Meeting
Tuesday, March 14, 2023
Teleconference Call
Columbia, South Carolina

Commission Members Participating via Conference Call:

Mr. Scott Cochran, Spartanburg Methodist College, Chair
Dr. Dondi Costin, Charleston Southern University, Vice Chair
Dr. Leroy Staggars, Morris College, Secretary
Dr. Maurice Scherrens, Newberry College
Dr. Gene Fant, North Greenville University
Dr. Matthew vandenBerg, Presbyterian College
Ms. Hannah Craig by proxy on behalf of Dr. William Barker, Southern Wesleyan University
Dr. Rusty Monhollon, CHE President and Executive Director, Ex-officio

Commission Members Absent:

Dr. Nayef Samhat, Wofford College

Non-Commission Member College Presidents Participating:

Dr. Tom Bogart, Columbia College
Dr. Rick Christman, Columbia International University
Dr. Monica Baloga, Limestone University
Dr. Dwaun Warmack, Claflin University

Mr. Scott Cochran, Commission Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:30 AM. Ms. Katie Harrison, Commission Executive Director, informed participants the meeting is being recorded and is being held in compliance with the Freedom of Information Act, welcomed all in attendance and conducted a roll call of the Commission Members participating via conference call. Ms. Harrison confirmed all participating Commission Members in attendance. A quorum was established. Ms. Harrison recognized and welcomed the non-Commission members in attendance.

Mr. Cochran called for a motion to approve the June 21, 2022, Commission Minutes. Dr. Leroy Staggars moved to approve the Minutes and Dr. Dondi Costin seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Mr. Cochran called on Ms. Harrison to report on 2021-2022 Program Reviews. Ms. Harrison reported on the twenty-one colleges who underwent Program Reviews for the 2021-2022 year, stating all reviews were submitted by the deadline, and all have been closed. Ms. Harrison reported there were only two findings program-wide with neither being repeat findings from the previous year. As a result of one of the findings, Ms. Harrison reminded all colleges of the record-maintenance requirements to prevent similar future findings. Ms. Harrison thanked all participants for their work during the Programs Reviews this year.

Mr. Cochran called on Mr. Zachary Christian, Commission Deputy Director, to report on the 2022-2023 Award Year. Mr. Christian began by adding to Ms. Harrison's record-maintenance requirements by stating that there will be additional guidance written into the 2023-2024 Policies and Procedures Manual. Mr. Christian reported that the Agency has a total available funding amount just over \$53,800,000 for the 2022-2023 Award Year. Our current maximum award amount for 2022-2023 is \$4,500. As of today, the Agency has seen an increase in total number of applications received, total commitments made, and total grants realized. Mr. Christian attributes the rise in applications to the 2022 Commission meeting's unanimously approved changes to the program, allowing the Agency to expand eligibility to more students. The agency awarded and disbursed to over 12,000 students which is up 7% from the previous year. Mr. Christian announced that for the first time in recent history, applicant show-up rate for 2021-22 is greater than forty-five percent.

Mr. Cochran called on Ms. Harrison to report on Agency Updates and Initiative. Ms. Harrison formally introduced Ms. Kira Demery, the Agency's new Program Coordinator, who joined the staff in January 2023. Ms. Harrison stated that Ms. Demery has proven herself as a strong employee who has been quick to comprehend the many nuances of the financial aid profession and state government. Both Ms. Demery and Mr. Christian attended the teleconferenced Commission meeting from South Carolina Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators' (SCASFAA) New Aid Officer Workshop, where Mr. Christian is a presenter and Ms. Demery is an attendee.

Ms. Harrison reported that Ms. Gena Miles has been completing a momentous amount of training through the state's contracted LinkedIn Learning platform. Ms. Miles has successfully completed over twenty Courses, Learning Paths and modules in the system. Ms. Miles has actively sought out ways to increase her skills and knowledge, and to discover new ways to increase efficiencies in internal processes through the LinkedIn Learning platform.

Ms. Harrison acknowledged Mr. Christian's role as President-Elect of SCASFAA and his recent opportunity to advocate for student financial aid issues and programs on Capitol Hill as part of the National Association of Financial Aid Administrators' (NASFAA) annual leadership and legislative conference through his recently acquired role.

Ms. Harrison described recently concluding her term as President of the National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs (NASSGAP) in October. Ms. Harrison continues to serve as part of the leadership planning team for the combined NASSGAP and State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) collaboration project to assist state agencies with their FAFSA Simplification efforts.

The Agency has been following FAFSA Simplification developments closely and have actively engaged in conversations with the U.S. Department of Education and national organizations such as NASSGAP, SHEEO, National College Achievement Network (NCAN), and NASFAA in regard to efforts and issues surrounding upcoming changes for the 2024-2025 year. Based on current information of the upcoming changes, Ms. Harrison described more students will be eligible for more Pell grant funds. Ms. Harrison stated that based on the information available at this time, possible changes would have impacts to institutions the Agency serves to include ability to package need-based aid early, and possible implications for institutional aid if indexed to Pell grant and/or financial need.

Ms. Harrison reported that the Agency has been working diligently with the state's Procurement Office to complete the process of acquiring a new Student Information System. The Agency has recently received the funding, chosen a vendor and is working through the final language of the contract with the undisclosed vendor to enter into said contract. Ms. Harrison stated the Agency's readiness to implement the chosen system, as well as training all college Financial Aid staff members on the utilization of the selected solution.

The Agency is currently undergoing a House Legislative Oversight Committee Review process. Ms. Harrison updated the Commission on the current state of the process. Ms. Harrison thanked President Scott Cochran

and Dr. Jeffrey Perez for their attendance and positive remarks on behalf of the Agency at the House Legislative Oversight Committee's Public Input Hearing on March 9, 2023.

Mr. Cochran called upon Eddie Shannon, Executive Vice President, South Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities (SCICU) to update the Commission on their Letter Writing Campaign. Mr. Shannon reported on last year's campaign where twenty out of twenty-one colleges participated, and acknowledged two colleges' efforts: Allen University, which had one hundred percent participation from their students and Anderson University, which had the most student letters written at 1,770 letters. Mr. Shannon stated that the campus Legislative Coordinators met with SCICU in December 2022, to discuss the Legislative Strategy for 2023. During that meeting, sample letters were given to the coordinators and the upcoming State Budget was discussed. Mr. Shannon reported that the letter writing campaign began in January, and information on the participation of the students during the campaign must be submitted to SCICU by April 4 in preparation for Higher Education Day on April 19. Mr. Shannon thanked all the colleges for all their hard work and support during these campaigns.

Mr. Cochran called upon Ms. Harrison to report on the Review of the 2023-2024 State Budget Request for Funding of the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program. Ms. Harrison stated that the budget process is underway, with the House scheduled to meet during the week of March 14, and the Finance Committee of the Senate scheduled to meet on April 4 to discuss the budget. The House is tentatively scheduled to make their budget recommendations the week of April 18. Ms. Harrison reported the Agency asked for continued funding of the \$10,000,000 increase from lottery appropriations for the Tuition Grants Program realized in FY 2022 and 2023 but did not request any additional funding.

Mr. Cochran called upon Dr. Jeffrey Perez, President and CEO of SCICU, to report on the 2023 Legislative Outlook. Dr. Perez began by addressing the Capitol Impact issues facing the letter writing campaigns this year, stating that it was a glitch in the system regarding redistricting. Dr. Perez thanked the Agency for all of the work that they have done to mediate these issues first-hand to get correct information out. Dr. Perez reported that he has communicated with the legislative coordinators and requested that they continue working with the data they have. Dr. Perez stressed the need for each campus to bring at least five students to Higher Education Day at the State House on April 19 to have a strong showing to complement the letter writing campaign.

Dr. Perez stated he does not expect any major changes to the Ways and Means recommendations, such as \$20,000,000 from lottery going to South Carolina Tuition Grants Program, which is the same as has happened in past years. Dr. Perez also reported that the suggested \$69,000,000 for tuition freeze in the public sector for 2-year institutions as recurring funds, \$15,000,000 to the technical colleges in recurring funds, and \$100,000,000 in Workforce Scholarship Grants to the technical college system are expected to be passed. Dr. Perez fielded a question from Mr. Cochran asking for an update on the Commission on Higher Education need-based grant changes. Dr. Perez reported that the Committee on Access and Equity and Student Services (CAESS) has decided to forego the discussion on making changes to CHE need-based grants until the state budget has been passed so they know how much money is at their disposal. Dr. Perez called upon Dr. Rusty Monhollon, CHE President and Executive Director to comment on behalf of CHE. Dr. Monhollon alluded to a June meeting of CAESS where changing the formula used to calculate award amounts would be discussed.

Mr. Cochran yielded to Dr. Dondi Costin, Commission Vice Chair, to facilitate the remainder of the meeting in his absence subsequent to Dr. Perez ending his report. Ms. Harrison stated that with Mr. Cochran's absence, a quorum was still met.

Dr. Costin called upon Ms. Harrison to present the Staff Recommendation for Change to the Mission and Vision Statements for consideration. Ms. Harrison opened by reminding participants that the Agency is undergoing the Review of the House Legislative Oversight Committee process, which includes the review of the South Carolina Tuition Grants Commission Mission and Vision Statements. Ms. Harrison presented the Commission's current Mission Statement, which dates back to 1974, as being lengthy and difficult to remember, and

proposed an option to make the verbiage more clear and concise. Ms. Harrison noted the basis of the Mission Statement remains the same, with changes primarily being made to the layout of the information. The proposed changes to the Vision Statement also take current lengthy verbiage and cuts to a concise one-sentence statement. Dr. Costin called for a motion to discuss changes. Dr. Maurice Scherrens moved to discuss changes in the Mission and Vision Statements; Dr. Gene Fant seconded the motion.

A discussion about verbiage took place, with Dr. Scherrens noting a need for the word “college” to be in the Mission Statement, as well as “private, higher education” to be in the Vision Statement. Dr. Monhollon agreed with Dr. Scherrens’ point. A proposed change had been agreed upon to change the end of the initial proposed Mission Statement to “providing need-based tuition grants to students who choose to attend an independent college or university.” Dr. Matthew vandenBurg noted the Vision Statement does not speak to the future. Ms. Harrison agreed and presented an option that a new proposal for the change in the Vision Statement would be disseminated to the Commission members. Dr. Costin presented the recommendation of the Statements to be approved as written in the proposal with the agreed upon change, and a new set of Statements to be presented for vote at a later date. Dr. Costin put the changes’ acceptance to a vote, which passed unanimously.

Dr. Costin called upon Mr. Christian to present upon a Staff Recommendation for a change to the Agency’s Non-Traditional Calendar Program Eligibility. The Commission’s current Eligibility Requirements include verbiage stating the approved Non-Traditional Program must “begin classes no sooner than 10 working days prior to the beginning of the college’s traditional fall semester and no later than 10 working days after the beginning of the college’s traditional fall semester, and end no earlier than 10 working days prior to the end of the college’s traditional spring semester and no later than 10 working days after the end the of college’s traditional spring semester.” In the proposed changes, the verbiage is shortened to one concise sentence stating the program must “begin classes no sooner than the first day of August and end classes no later than the last day of May, to coincide with the traditional fall and spring semesters.” Mr. Christian described the proposed update as eliminating the fear or worry of institutions losing eligibility for their students in these populations, as well as eliminating the need for financial aid offices and administrators to work with academic offices to make sure the start and end dates are within the previously described definition. Dr. Costin requested a motion to begin the discussion of the proposed changes to the Non-Traditional Program Eligibility Requirements. Dr. Fant moved to approve the proposed changes. Dr. Staggers seconded the motion. No discussion was found necessary, and the motion passed unanimously.

Dr. Costin called upon Ms. Harrison to present upon a Staff Recommendation regarding Initial 2023-2024 South Carolina Tuition Grant award amount. Based on the support of the additional \$20,000,000 in Lottery Funding continuing for the 2023-2024 year, the agency recommended the Maximum Grant should be increased from the current 2022-2023 Maximum Grant of \$4,500 to a Maximum Grant of \$4,700 for the 2023-2024 Award Year with confidence that the amount will not need to adjusted if the vote were to go through. Dr. Costin called for a motion to increase the Maximum Grant for 2023-2024 Award Year to \$4,700. Dr. Scherrens moved to approve the change. Dr. Staggers seconded the motion. Dr. Costin presented a question about funding not being approved through the budget affecting the requested change in Maximum Grant Award Amount. Ms. Harrison described the process in which the amount recommendation was arrived upon, and assured the Commission that the carry-over funds at the disposal of the Agency would cover any funds not received through the budget approvals. No other discussion was had. Dr. Costin put the motion to a vote which passed unanimously. Ms. Harrison thanked the Commission for supporting the greatest award amount in the history of the program once again.

Dr. Costin reminded all Commission members to complete their Ethics filing by the March 31, 2023 deadline.

Dr. Costin asked if there was any new business. There was none.

Dr. Costin reminded all that the next meeting is scheduled for June 20, 2023 at 10:30 am.

Dr. Costin called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Staggers moved to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Fant seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. Dr. Costin adjourned the meeting at 11:40 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Ms. Kira Demery
Acting Secretary for
Dr. Leroy Staggers, Secretary
South Carolina Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission